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**city council meeting article**

Alison Neubauer

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Champaign residents are concerned about long term exposure to toxic chemicals in their ground water from Ameren's toxic site near the Fifth and Hill neighborhood. Ameren recently released information of testing reports that show large parts of the property that pose a threat to people due to vaporization of toxic chemicals from contaminated ground water.

Claudia Lennhoff from the Champaign County Health Care Consumers, addressed the city council at the meeting Tuesday regarding the 2007 Ground Water Restriction Ordinance. The ordinance only deals with ingestion of water but does not mention contact with or inhalation of water.

"Vaporization means that you have the risk of inhaling. This has been a long-standing concern of the residents and their concern has been about long term exposure to vaporization and inhalation," said Lennhoff.

Long term exposure to this contaminated water can lead to Neurological problems, cancers, asthmas, reproductive health problems and many others.

The test results show that the levels of toxic chemicals exceed the safety standards for residential property. Lennhoff said that there is residential property 50 ft. away from the toxic site and they haven't tested levels outside their boundaries..

"There is no reason to think that vaporization stops at the boundaries of this fenced in area," said Lennhoff. "Other new information is that the ground water is far more contaminated than we have ever been told or led to believe."

There are 20 different toxins identified in the water. Benzene, a highly toxic chemical, is one of them. Lennhoff explained that the safety standards for Benzene are not to exceed five parts per billion but Ameren's test results from that well show 1000 parts per billion.

According to Lennhoff, in Ameren's report they do not plan to clean up the contaminated ground water and they don't have to because of the ordinance the City of Champaign passed in the summer of 2007.

"It's important to understand that the only thing this ordinance accomplishes for the people of the city of Champaign is that it prohibits them from drinking contaminated water which they have not been doing," said Lennhoff.

In this neglected neighborhood, the contaminated water floods resident's basements and property, and flows into Boneyard Creek effecting residents.

"There are many gardens in the neighborhood where people grow vegetables, sell and get vegetables which has been going on for years," said Lennhoff. She also said that there are children's daycare centers surrounding the contaminated property.

According to Lennhoff, the ordinance allows Ameren to not clean up the contaminated ground water.

Ameren's report said that they are using an "institutional control to remediate the toxic ground water." Lennhoff said that the institutional control is the city ordinance.

"What this amounts to is an administrative sleight of hand that allows Ameren to have the appearance of addressing contaminated ground water," said Lennhoff, "the use of this ordinance is what's allowing Ameren off the hook for cleaning up the ground water."

According to Lennhoff, the real intent of this ordinance was to protect Ameren from incurring the costs associated with doing a thorough cleanup which would be very costly.

" It doesn't necessarily result in truly protecting and promoting the health of the residents of the neighborhood and the city," said Lennhoff.

The city of Champaign worked with the Illinois EPA to pass this ordinance. Lennhoff said that there are concerns about the Illinois EPA being close with Ameren and helping them.

"The best case would be if the EPA would be a watchdog, not a lapdog for Ameren," said Lennhoff.

Ameren and the Illinois EPA only focus on there being no immediate effects to people but they don't mention the long term effects.

"I would hope that the City of Champaign will re-examine this issue and see if there's a way to work with the Illinois EPA and Ameren and basically demand that Ameren do clean up the contaminated ground water." said Lennhoff.

#### Sources

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